



## King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1080/14616742.2018.1516512](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.1516512)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Chisholm, A., & Eichler, M. (2018). Reproductions of Global Security: Accounting for the Private Security Household. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.1516512>

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# **The Private within the Global Private Security Industry: Accounting for the Private Security Household<sup>1</sup>**

Amanda Chisholm, Newcastle University  
Email: amanda.chisholm@ncl.ac.uk

Maya Eichler, Mount Saint Vincent University  
Email: Maya.Eichler@msvu.ca

---

<sup>1</sup> A conversation with Cynthia Enloe first sparked our interest in interviewing contractor spouses, and we are grateful to her for that inspiration. We thank the women who generously took the time to share their perspective with us. We also thank the two anonymous reviewers and our colleagues Kyle Grayson, Saskia Stachowitsch, Julia Welland, and Rachel Woodward for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of the article. Maya Eichler acknowledges support from an internal Mount Saint Vincent University New Scholars Grant, funded through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, as well as support from the Canada Research Program of the Government of Canada during the writing of this article. Amanda Chisholm acknowledges the support from the Economic and Social Research Council in producing this article.

Abstract:

This article shows how private security households exist at the nexus of two foundational logics of contemporary warfare – militarism and neoliberalism. The celebration of neoliberalism and normalization of militarism allow the private security industry to draw upon the labour of eager contractors and their supportive spouses. This article develops a feminist analysis of the role of the private security household in global security assemblages. We ask: In what ways are households connected to the outsourcing of security work to Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs), and how are these connections gendered? Through interviews with female spouses of former UK Special Air Services soldiers, now private security contractors, we demonstrate how the household is both silenced and yet indispensable to how PMSCs operate and how liberal states conduct war. These spouses supported the transition from military service to private security work, managed the household, and planned their careers or sacrificed them to accommodate their husband's security work. Their gendered labour was conditioned by former military life but animated by neoliberal market logics. For the most part, the women we interviewed normalized the militarized values of their husband's work and celebrated the freedom and financial rewards this type of security work brought.

Keywords: private security, households, female spouses, women's labour, private military and security companies

## **Introduction**

Cynthia Enloe's (1989) question "Where are the women?" has been fundamental to showing how women remain indispensable to the waging of war. Yet this question is rarely pursued within studies about private military and security companies (PMSCs). While women are seldom found working as security contractors (Eichler 2013), they are performing vital support labour within private security households. Indeed, feminist scholars show us, by locating the household, how militarism is diffused outside military institutions and permeates the everyday, including the unpaid reproductive labour of spouses (Enloe 1989, 2000; Gray 2016; Hyde 2016; Basham and Catignani 2018). Our article highlights the role of private security households in contemporary warfare waged through private/public security assemblages (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011). These households exist at the nexus of two foundational logics of contemporary warfare – militarism, which legitimizes the waging of war, and neoliberalism, which increasingly applies market practices to how wars are conducted.

To make this claim, we draw upon conceptualisations of the household within Feminist Security Studies (FSS) and Feminist Global Political Economy (FGPE) literatures. Based on interviews with British national private security contractor spouses, we show the ways in which spouses of security contractors are called upon to support PMSCs. This paper focuses on the typical western private security family: a former military family consisting of a male private contractor, a female spouse, and, most often, children. We ask: In what ways are these households connected to the broader privatization of security operations, and how are these connections gendered?

Feminist scholarship on PMSCs has shown us how privatization of security is profoundly gendered. Gender informs how boundaries between the international and everyday get demarcated in global security labour chains (Chisholm and Stachowitsch 2016) and in how PMSCs draw upon masculinized images of security to compete in the market for force (Joachim and Schneiker 2012; Stachowitsch 2015). Gender and race intersect to produce divisions of labour amongst contractors within security operations that heavily rely on migrant labour from the global South (Eichler 2014; Chisholm 2015; Barker 2009, Chisholm 2014a; 2014b) and to assign value to particular security services (Chisholm 2017). Overall feminist scholarship on PMSCs illustrates that gender continues to shape and enable contemporary security practices, in both familiar and new ways (Eichler 2013; 2015). However, the PMSC household has yet to be considered.

For this paper we understand the household as a space where social reproduction occurs (Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2014, 90). This includes life sustaining practices of caring for children and aging parents, for example, but also “daily practices of mutual support, including income-pooling and labor sharing” (Douglass 2012, 4). The household is not a fixed or bounded space/temporality, but rather a site within which gender roles and enactments of nationalism (see e.g. Hedström 2016) as well as militarism and neoliberalism are reproduced. FSS scholars have convincingly located military families as integral to military operations and the reproduction of militarism (Williams and Massaro 2013; Fluri 2009; Gray 2016; 2017; Basham and Catignani 2018; Hedström 2016). By extension, the household as an analytical and geographic site has also been central for FGPE scholars concerned with broader economic processes of neoliberalism and capitalism (LeBaron and Roberts 2010; Elias and Gunawardana 2013; Safri and Graham 2010; Tepe-Belfrage and Montgomerie 2016). Examining the households of those working in the

private security industry, we argue, further develops our knowledge about how private security reproduces gender inequalities and how military households are undergoing changes through both broader geopolitics and global economic processes. The private security household then is a site for enactments and diffusion of both neoliberal markets and militarization. Just as Basham and Catignani (2018) show us how the labour of British military reserve households is a reflection of the broader outsourcing and flexibilization of the work model within the British military—so too are the private security households brought in to participate as gendered sites, in order to sustain the broader western military outsourcing of security work to PMSCs.

Like emerging labour trends within western militaries (Basham and Catignani 2018), PMSCs are built on a flexible work model, which requires contractors to sign onto short-term contracts, be ready at short notice to deploy for work, to perform long work hours in often austere and hostile environments, and to be out of work between contracts (Singer 2003). Similar to Basham and Catignani's (2018) work on military reserve households, our research on the private security household shows how these same geopolitical security operations depend upon a flexible security family home as well—one where the spouse takes on a majority of the household labour in the contractor's absence. Yet, as we show later in this paper, it is broader processes of both militarization and neoliberalization that underpin this private security flexible work model. It is the nexus of militarization *and* neoliberalization that distinguishes the private security household from the 'traditional' military household.

We believe the argument we make in this paper has significant theoretical implications because it makes visible the ways gendered labour is both silenced and necessary in the broader privatization of security and how neoliberalism and militarism as logics condition the kinds of gendered work these families do. It also brings into conversation how the ways in which these

families are conditioned, and mobilized in support of broader security practices, are both similar and different from their military household counterparts. The spouses of contractors are key in this analysis. Through their own words, this article demonstrates how they are part of a broader reconfiguring of military labour by helping with the transition from military service to private security work, managing of the household, and planning their careers or sacrificing them to accommodate their husband's work. Such labour is conditioned through former military life—all but one of those interviewed were formerly army wives—but animated by neoliberalism, where, for the most part, those interviewed celebrated the freedom and financial rewards their husband's security work brought to their lives. Militarism and its ideal of the self-reliant, self-sacrificing military spouse prepares women to embrace the demands expected by the private security industry. At the same time, neoliberal rationalities of privileging economic incentives, individual advantages, and personal freedom replace previous justifications for women's support labour on the basis of militarism and patriotism. Women's supportive labour may take similar form across public and private security, but it is driven by different logics, and seen as a celebration of market choice rather than the demands of the industry as a greedy institution (Segal 1986).

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. First, we situate our study within the fields of FSS and FGPE to show how a focus on private security families is both underpinned by “security” and “economic” concerns. Second, we explain our choice of methodology and argue for the importance of interviewing female spouses in gaining insights into the private security industry. Third, we demonstrate the ways in which wives are key players in sustaining PMSC operations. We do this by focusing on three main themes: 1) the role of spouses in the transition from military to private security, 2) the career sacrifices of spouses and how they make sense of them, and 3) the unconditional support labour provided by spouses on an everyday basis. We

conclude by discussing the implications of our study for understanding private security and for further advancing how we theorize the relationship between militarism, neoliberalism, and the household in contemporary public/private security arrangements.

### **Theoretical Context: Feminist Scholarship on Militarism and Neoliberalism**

Scholars within FSS have provided ample examples of how militarism as an ideology and militaries as institutions are gendered (Enloe 1989; Sjoberg 2009; Sjoberg and Tickner 2013; Stern 2005). They have shown that militarism conditions not only military members but broader civilian communities and private families. They have argued that the institution of marriage and the unpaid support labour of military wives in particular are central to the functioning and international operations of militaries (Enloe, 1989; 2000; 2016; Gray 2016). Harrison and Laliberté (1994) and more recently Gray (2016; 2017), Hyde (2016) and Basham and Catignani (2018) have documented the gendered division of labour within military families, and the expectations for women to take on primary responsibility for domestic labour, sacrifice their own careers, and volunteer time for the military. Militaries have been paying increased attention to military spouses in order to ensure their loyalty in support of military readiness (Horn 2009).

FGPE work has further demonstrated that the public and private cannot be seen as dichotomous (Peterson 2003; McDowell 2009), and that household work is integral to the functioning of public economies (Fortunati 1995; Elias and Gunawardana 2013). At the same time, women's work is both feminized and 'naturalized' and hence devalued within national and global political economies (Luxton 1980; McDowell 2009). FGPE scholarship also has shown how the household is, often coercively, forced into market relations or becomes a site of state/market reform (Elias and Gunawardana 2013; Tepe-Belfrage and Montgomerie 2016).



Consequently, accounting for the household and changing nature of women's unpaid labour within it, as it shifts with broader market movements, gives us a more accurate account of the social and human costs of economic policies (Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2014; Waring 1999).

Over the last decade a body of feminist scholarship on private security has emerged at the nexus of FSS and FGPE. Animated by both security and economic concerns, feminist scholarship on PMSCs has uncovered how private security shapes and is shaped by masculinities, femininities, and gendered relations of power (see, for example, Eichler 2015; Chisholm 2017; Chisholm and Stachowitsch 2018). It asks: how is gender fundamental to the emergence, functioning, and effects of private security? While vibrant and diverse in its focus, this literature has so far ignored the role of the security household. Consequently, questions around how households are changing in how they support/resist broader market and militarized practices have yet to be considered. In what ways are households and the everyday reproducing gendered divisions of labour and what kind of labour is being asked of them? We hope to fill this lacuna with our focus on the private security household.

### **Methodology: Interviewing Female Spouses**

Our analysis draws upon interviews with ten female partners of former UK Special Air Service (SAS) soldiers, now working as highly skilled (and highly paid) private security contractors in various overseas operations. Out of the ten interviews, nine took place in Hereford, UK during December 2014, with the final interview occurring over Skype in January 2015. Hereford is the base for the UK's SAS, the Special Forces branch of the UK Ministry of Defence. Consequently, Hereford is a key hub for private security as many of the SAS men leave

military service for private security work, either as company owners or security contractors, maintaining their family residence and community ties within Hereford.

LGBTQI and racial minorities within the UK and other Western militaries remain underrepresented and this is especially true of Special Forces units. As such, the interviewees we could access were white (cis)women in heterosexual familial relations. All but one of the spouses we interviewed shared a common experience of military life. Interviewees had spent anywhere from three to twenty-seven years as military spouses, and between two to seventeen years as private contractor spouses. Two of our interviewees had worked in the military themselves (albeit for much shorter periods than their husbands), one as army clerk and the other as medical staff in the reserves (Territorial Army). Women who worked outside the home were the exception. When they did pursue employment, it was often part-time and flexible work. This choice, as we demonstrate later in the paper, was seen as vital to maintaining a strong family home.

The SAS community is highly secretive which made gaining access to the wives/partners of these private contractors difficult. Whilst people within Hereford know about the regiment, and their extended "private" former serving members and families, they also know not to ask too many questions. This performance of secrecy makes it difficult to connect and engage with the community when you are not one of them. Our fieldwork was facilitated by the fact that one of the authors was at the time a spouse of a private security contractor with close ties to the community. We drew upon her existing contacts to spread the word about our research project and to recruit participants. For the most part this was a successful endeavor and the wives were forthcoming with their responses and generous with their time. The co-author's personal links to the security industry provided access to a community otherwise not available to outside

researchers. Her proximity to this research community also gave her legitimacy that would not be possible for an outsider (Adler and Adler 1987). Yet at the same time, the insider co-author faced challenges with the “dual role” (Ibid: 73) of empathizing with this community and being the “analytical” researcher. A potential risk with holding this dual role is having the research guided by the researchers’ own experiences and not the participants (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

These challenges were in part mitigated by the co-author who held an outsider position, with no connections to the community. Where the “outside” author would have not likely gotten access to this community, her distance from the community gave a different perspective in the interview design, interview process, and in the analysis of the transcripts. The research and following analysis then is the result of a “space between” position (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 60). The coproduction of knowledge was crucial in mitigating challenges associated with both insider and outsider positions, and neither of the authors could have conducted the interviews on their own.

The interviews conducted were in-depth and took on a semi-structured format. They most often took place in the personal homes of interviewees and lasted between 50 minutes to 1.5 hours. The interviews focused on how these women experienced and supported their husband’s transition from military to private security work, how they understood the kind of work their husbands do as contractors, and how they saw their own role in relation to their husband’s work. The discussions below examine some of the key insights we gained about private security from the perspectives of female contractor spouses. We use pseudonyms throughout when referring to our interviewees.

## **Private Security from the Perspective of Female Spouses**

Security privatization relies on market de-regulation and the outsourcing of security functions to private companies, but also on individual men and women who choose to participate in and support the industry. Such support is often legitimized through adherence to and the normalization of militarism (the view that military and security service is honorable and important) and neoliberalism (the view that the market frees us to pursue our own entrepreneurial potential). Both militarism and neoliberalism are prevalent in the variety of reasons men and women give for supporting (and sometimes celebrating) the security industry. Personal, financial, and familial motivations exist as previous scholarship has also shown (Franke and von Boemcken 2011), and these are often shaped by legacies of militarization and new-found neoliberal incentives (Chisholm 2014b). Legacies of militarization prepare the men for private security work and the women for unpaid support work. Neoliberalism creates incentives, rewards, but also new forms of precarity to navigate. Jobs in the industry are not guaranteed and compliance is often secured by the fact that there are more people wanting to work in the security industry than there are jobs available.

Private security also depends upon the intellectual, emotional and physical labour of the wives of contractors and on male contractors taking on the role of the sole or primary breadwinner and absent husband/father. These gendered sacrifices are made for the sake of the family, to achieve ideals of economic security and status built on a traditional heteronormative gendered family model. Sacrifices are also a part of the everyday military household, whereby the military is seen as a “greedy institution” (Segal 1986; Basham and Catignani 2018: 6), in how it demands operational effectiveness comes first, and family second (Gray 2016). Yet our interviews reveal interesting differences in relation to existing research on military wives, in how

these private contractor wives understand the demands that the industry makes on their husbands and on themselves as managers of the household.

### ***Becoming a Private Contractor: The Role of Spouses***

All but one of the spouses we interviewed noted that their husbands saw private security as the only viable option and the kind of work that *they're best at*. As such, the men had not considered another line of work or retraining, and instead saw private security as the best place to make use of their highly specialized militarized skills. This appears to be a common thread not only in our research, but also Chisholm's (2014a) research on Gurkhas' motivations for joining private security. Similar to the contractors, the spouses did not question their husband's career choice—in fact, many women actively encouraged it. In our interviews, it became obvious that the spouses played a key role in the decision to leave the military and in helping men transition from military to private security. Spouses were key in enabling a smooth transition from military member to private contractor.

Women's support consisted of both administrative and emotional labour. It ranged from active reassurance that they, as a family unit, would adjust well, to logistical advice such as how to register with the UK's national health services (NHS). Our interviewees saw themselves emotionally supporting and actively encouraging their husbands to make the transition. Mary explained how she had to push her husband to “just bite the bullet”:

... he was frightened, because he'd been in the army for 22 years... I think it's harder for men than women, because I think they prefer being told what to do, where to go. I mean, he said, “I'm just frightened at leaving, what if I don't get a job” and it would be so easy

for him to stay where he was, and carry on doing it. But, I just said “Well, you’ve got to do it at some point, just bite the bullet”. He did, and he was glad he did afterwards.

Stephanie similarly commented on how unprepared her husband was for the civilian world:

Scary. He was very apprehensive, ‘cause it was all of a sudden you haven’t got the backup of the army behind you. And also I found that he was quite naïve as far as everyday life was concerned, although he’s hugely experienced now, in the military field, when it came to everyday life, it amazed me how naïve he was really. And it was in respect to dealing with normal things that I took for granted.

These women actively participated in their spouse’s decision to leave military service and helped them navigate the transition to civilian life. Many took a hands-on approach in facilitating the logistical necessities of such a transition. These women drew on their own civilian work experiences and skill sets to facilitate their husband’s transition as well as emotionally support them and encourage them about the value of their own skill sets in the market.

For all families, the key decision factor to seek employment in private security was financial, and driven by neoliberal values of prioritizing financial incentives above all else. As Monica explained, the financial motivation is one that is often made from the perspective of the family unit and in the interests of the children:

... as a family, we made the decision that he would earn more money in private security than if he stayed in the regiment. Because I think they had just stopped the, or they were

going to stop, the boarding school allowance, which we were using for the boys to put them through private education, so we decided as a family... and he was happy to do it in the end, and he knew it was the right decision to do, to come out and work, so that we could keep the boys in private education ... And it was really a family decision.

The normalization of the transition and the celebration of the increased possibilities through financial remuneration made this decision to join the security industry straightforward, masking the fundamental shift in logic from serving the state to prioritizing individual advantages. Thus, not only does the everyday militarism of the security home feature in PMSC recruitment as has been shown in previous scholarship (Chisholm and Stachowitsch 2016), recruitment itself is further facilitated by wives, in their encouragement to make the transition and in setting up their husbands for economically advantageous civilian private work.

These excerpts reveal how integral these women's advice and guidance were for the men during the transition. They demonstrate that the transition of the soldier to private contractor is not one made by the individual in isolation, but is embedded within a broader transition of the military family to the private security family. Militarism is firmly situated in the fact that both spouse and contractor see security work as natural and normal. The transcripts also demonstrate the role of finance in the transition. Financial incentives appeared as integral to achieving the individual family's freedom and flexibility, and rooted in the idea of rewards for the good neoliberal subject (Gill and Scharff 2011). In the case of private security, neoliberalism acts as a governing modality that motivates participation, in both the freedom and financial payoffs the industry provides. At the same time families become compliant, while going unacknowledged, to the labour demands of the industry. As such, contractors and their families become compliant to

the labour management practices demanded by the industry. Their compliance is facilitated by their former conditioning through military life, as we discuss next.

### ***Sacrificing Careers: From demands of military life to incentives of private security***

Most of the women we interviewed had given up their own careers in order to be flexible to the demands of military life while their husbands were still in the military. However, similar to the frustrations articulated by military wives in previous research (Gray 2016; Hyde 2016), our interviewees struggled to become accustomed to the demands that were expected of them by the military. The women noted the initial shock of becoming a military wife. Often with no prior knowledge of what the expectations would be, they faced a “steep learning curve” (Kim) in the first years of their marriages. It was about learning a new way of life, one that demanded unconditional support of spouses and often coupled with lack of knowledge and control over their circumstances. Most of the wives were married to their spouses at a time when there was a perceived immediate threat of Irish Republic Army (IRA) attacks on UK soil, and where the SAS was a key target. Consequently, there was an everyday secrecy to their husband’s military work. One of our interviewees told the story of coming home to a note on the kitchen table from her husband saying he loved her and did not know when he would be back, apparently not an unusual occurrence for SAS families. Such experiences have conditioned the women we interviewed to take control of the family unit and not rely upon regular emotional or physical support from their husbands. These stories reflect the broader research on military wives and how the military remains a greedy institution (Basham and Catignani 2018), whereby military operational effectiveness (Gray 2016) and military deployment come first. Families are



conditioned to be supportive of military operations, yet this conditioning is not without its ruptures (Basham and Catignani 2018).

Throughout the interviews, women spoke to how they had become conditioned through their lives as military wives, to manage on their own during long and sometimes unexpected separations, to be the primary and often sole caregivers for the children, and to accept that their husband's military work took priority over their own careers. This dynamic remained intact, and was even reinforced, when their husbands transitioned into private security work and continued to be away from home for extended periods of time. The private security industry is also a *greedy institution* in which private contractor spouses are called upon to “just make it work” (Basham and Catignani, 2018: 6). The flexibility demanded of the family household is conditioned through the privileging of men's work and appears to be a necessary part of both the private security industry and the military. Yet, in the private security context, women's labour becomes even more marginalized and less visible than that of military wives, while men's labour becomes more demanding of flexibility and less regulated—their work becomes shaped by the precarities of the market.

In order for players in the industry to be competitive, they require a flexible security contractor—someone who will work long hours in austere conditions and be ready to mobilize within days should a contract be awarded. In turn, the contractor will lose their job if the contract is terminated or not renewed. This work model relies upon the further flexibilization of the household and on the willingness of wives to pick up everyday reproductive tasks, conduct the necessary unpaid labour, and have flexible work schedules themselves. Neoliberal market conditions place demands on the workforce for greater flexibility and availability, and so too

households must increase the flexibility of their reproductive work to *pick up the slack* (Peterson 2003; Basham and Catignani 2018).

Two of the women we interviewed, Kim and Patricia, thought that working outside the home allowed them to be independent and better wives, and that their work offered a distraction from their husband's absences and the dangerous work environments. The other wives felt that having flexible/casual work or not working outside the home allowed them to be better wives and mothers. It ensured that home and family life were maintained for their husbands upon return from their work abroad. Stephanie, for example, had chosen a part-time career with a flexible schedule that could compliment her husband's work schedule:

In some ways you sacrifice your own career in a way. I retrained when I met my husband, and I went to do accountancy, with a view towards being self-employed, because it gave me the flexibility to work almost full time when he was away, and then go down to three days a week when he was home, and that's always worked really well for us. Because it's given me my independence. I mean, it's given me a career, but ... in some ways it's held me back because there are other things I would have liked to have done, but it would have compromised our marriage...

Stephanie deliberately made the choice to be a stay at home wife in order to maintain a strong relationship with her husband that would still be there when the children grew up and moved on. Unlike Basham and Catignani's (2018) research on reserve army wives, Stephanie did not see her flexible labour as a point of contention. It was market logics of greater 'choice' in what contracts her husband could chose, often seen as a key feature of neoliberalism, which ostensibly

granted her and her husband more freedom (via increased pay) but also cemented them into prescribed gender roles (i.e male breadwinner and female caregiver). She also noted that while she made sacrifices in regard to her career, having at least part-time work gave her some independence. Overall, she prioritized her husband's career and their marriage over her own pursuit of a career, thus not only normalizing military service and private security work as privileged and necessary, but also reproducing a male breadwinner family model. She celebrated the flexibility of the workplace because her primary focus continued to be sustaining a strong marriage by maintaining a happy household and making herself physically available when her husband was on leave from security work. The security market, as a space where households could choose the work contractor husbands took on, then was not perceived as a greedy institution, even though it demanded a similar amount of flexible work from wives compared to militaries.

Anna shared Stephanie's sentiments. While acknowledging the sacrifices she made, she felt that it was her role to be physically and emotionally present when her husband returned from work. She implied that her husband's career or schedule is non-negotiable, and that flexibility is instead expected from the wife. She explained in relation to her work choices:

I started to think, well, if I work all the nights, and I got to sleep all day, when he's home, you're like in that rotation of things and you don't see each other, so and actually this has worked out better, 'cause, he comes home ... and they do expect you to be home, cause if I worked all the time I'd never see him. ... but this way, we've managed to book holidays, to get away with the kids and do other things. ... I've sacrificed, 'cause you know,

nursing has changed a lot, and don't think I'd go back to it really now as it is. But I enjoy being at home.

Kim acknowledged the pay-off between loss of career and maintaining a relationship and family life. At the same time, in the interview the argument shifted towards one in which her husband's work in private security is what permits her to be a stay at home mother. The following quotation is illustrative of this tension:

Our unit functions perfectly without [partner] here because I don't have to work, and that is only because of the job that [partner] has and the income that he has, that allows that to happen. I am thinking of going back to work in the future, but it would only be very part-time, and again, it's not like we're reliant on my income to stay afloat, I can pick and choose things around the children and I'm very fortunate to be in that position.

The demands of private security work often do not permit spouses to pursue their own careers, but the high incomes paid to Western private security contractors are also seen as a pay-off and as enabling a traditional family model based on male breadwinner and female caregiver. Women did not necessarily make sense of their decisions to forgo a career as sacrifice. Instead, they saw themselves as supporters of an industry that allowed them to stay at home, thus prioritizing the economic benefits over a more equal distribution of labour within the household.

What emerges from the interviews is the material incentives of working in private security and the idea of choice in what contracts their husbands pursued which obscure the costs and demands of the industry. Instead, private security is primarily seen as enabling a particular privileged family life style, with "traditional" gender roles and a gendered division of labour. The

security work the husbands do afford women the possibility of staying at home, and it also enables fathers to spend more time with their children in between deployments, and thus for the family to spend quality time together. Kim said that she tells her children that “Daddy has to go away to work so that we can have our lovely house and so that he can come home and spend a long time with us when he’s not working.” Unlike the research by Basham and Catignani (2018), which detailed how military reserve wives understood their husband works away from the family for long periods of time as a hardship, Kim saw this same work pattern as allowing the family to be more flexible and spend extended periods of time together. The celebration of a labour management model like this depends upon a gendered logic that naturalizes the husband's work as more important and necessary to support the family—and as an honourable profession (all interviewees defined their partners work as such). The flexibility (if not the precarity) of private security work was also celebrated in that it allowed the family more control and freedom compared to military life. So while it appears as though similar work demands are required in both military and private security forces, the military continues to be seen as greedy (Basham and Catignani 2018), whereas the security industry is perceived as a space for freedom and choice.

Anna shared Kim’s sentiments in that her husband’s work allowed them to have a better quality of family life. She explained:

... my husband [is] actually semi-retired, [be]cause he’s only ever worked six months of the year. So we have a whole six months together, in chunks where we can go for two weeks’ holiday and still have plenty of time for the family, and so I guess it was much better.

These interview excerpts with the wives demonstrate the ways in which women negotiate the demands of family life and their husband's careers in private security. Some chose to be stay at home mothers and wives, while others sought part-time flexible employment outside the home. Pursuing a full-time career was exceptional among the private contractor spouses we spoke to. Men's private security work seems to demand that spouses are willing to take on primary or sole responsibility for children and other household duties. It followed from the assumption that men had to adhere to their contracts and thus that women had to take on and manage the security family home. Women's unpaid and usually unacknowledged gendered labour within the private security household takes many forms as we show next.

### *Unconditional Spousal Support for Private Contractors*

Women's labour supports their contractor husband's careers on a day-to-day basis in a variety of ways. The spouses we interviewed paid special attention to supporting their husbands during deployments and during homecomings, times of increased stress for their husbands. During deployments, this unconditional support was established through regular telephone and internet communications. As exemplified by Mary, Kelsey, and Jennifer when asked whether they feel the need to support their husbands while they are working overseas:

“... you just have to listen when they phone.” (Kelsey)

“I feel like I have to hold back [on telling him my daily frustrations] because I don't want to make things worse for him.” (Mary)

"...he will vent off on me if he's getting really frustrated, and I will manage to calm him down because he can go a bit over the top sometimes, you know." (Jennifer)

In all these contexts, women felt their role was primarily to listen to their husband, to be a sounding board for them. When we asked Anna if she discusses family issues while her husband was abroad she told us that "you try to deal with it yourself." Instead of worrying her husband of the "private" seemingly banal domestic duties when he was working overseas, Anna drew upon the same resilience expressed by many of the women we interviewed. The woman's role, we were told, was to be the silent listener and the supportive wife, and to handle the domestic life and ensure the husband felt included but not bothered by the "trivial" daily everydayness of family life. Stephanie however did not always take on the silent "listening" role as much as the other wives did. She argued that for her it depended upon what security work her husband did. She explained:

It depended where he was, what he was doing at the time. For instance, when he was in a volatile area, where he was doing, working in Iraq and it was extremely stressful for him—every day was stressful. Every day was dangerous. I didn't bother him with it, because I didn't think it was fair for him to have to worry about it on top of everything else. So I did used to keep it to myself and I've got a good family around me and they would help me if there was a big problem. I kept any problems away from him then. Because I knew his concentration had to be on the job, because there was certain times in our marriage for the past 15 years where he has been in volatile situations...

Upon returning from deployment, unconditional support takes another form. In our interviews, women acknowledged the need to “manage” their husbands by making sure they feel a part of the family upon return despite their often long physical absences. This is particularly the case with contractors who have young children. The wives felt obligated to ensure that the father was always present in the day-to-day activities by continually talking about him to the children and preparing the children for his physical return. In other cases, women expressed the need to let their husbands ease into the day-to-day family life after being physically away. Mary, for example, when asked how she handles the homecoming after deployment responded:

“I think in a way you have to give a bit, just kind of back off and let them be the men, do what they want to do, do man things.”

“...you do have to back off a bit and not say, ‘I managed without you, I’m fine’”.

As much as many of the wives attempted to include the husbands in the daily running of the home by talking about them to their children, some wives attempted to distance their husbands from the frustrations of day-to-day family life in raising children. Stephanie and Anna felt they needed to ensure the home was managed well, the kids taken care of and the house welcoming and warm for the husband to return to. Anna drew upon her consistency in being home and ensuring the household and family welfare is taken care of in her response: “[I think it’s important] just being here all the time, you run the house, you look after the kids...” Stephanie claimed that it was important for her to run the household so that “[her husband] can just step in and out and nothing changes, and then when they come back, everything is the same. Nice meal



ready for them, you're there in every single way for them. A safety net, that however bad things get around there, they've got that safety net to come back to."

These women's experiences demonstrate how fundamental their emotional and physical labour are in facilitating the work their husbands do in private security. Such labour is also fundamental to sustaining broader (gendered) households globally (James 1989). The transcripts furthermore highlight the importance of the political separation between the everyday banal and the global in reinforcing security work as privileged. It is this very separation of everyday and global that allows the security industry to continue to extract both male contractors' and their female spouses' labour in the way it does.

Importantly, while the move from military to market was normalized and celebrated, and spouses tended to embrace the demands of the industry, there were also tensions that came to light in our interviews. Tensions were felt by wives when they encountered the insecurities the security market brings. As Tammy explains: "I suppose when he did finish with the military, I suddenly thought 'Oh we haven't got that comfort behind you'. That security. I suddenly realized that basically when you go into the private sector, you are very much ... you got to look after yourself. You haven't got that comfort blanket." Although most wives had experienced the transition to private security as a positive change, they noted the lack of support structures in place for families and spouses of contractors. Jennifer noted that there had always been some support available in the military, but there was none available to her now that her husband worked in private security.

While private security removes some of the support structures that were in place when their husbands had worked in the military, it continues to demand sacrifices and unpaid labour from women. Women's support labour remains crucial but gains less visibility and recognition in the private security sector compared to the military. In comparison to military spouses, the already

gendered concept of the “private”—as apolitical, related to insignificant domestic labour and the household—attains an additional layer of gendered meaning in the context of private security: Contractor spouses represent “the private within the private”. It is a space of even greater invisibility than that experienced by military spouses who are entitled to some benefits and granted some public recognition. Yet it is also a space where spouses find freedom to *take back* control over their lives. The wives we interviewed commented upon how, unlike their experiences as military wives, they felt free to determine their family’s own direction through the choice in contractual work their husbands took on.

Overall then, the industry continues to rely upon the conditioning of spouses as eager facilitators in the recruitment of their husband’s labour, as advancers of the benefits of free market choice versus paternal military relations towards the family, and grateful beneficiaries of the financial remuneration that their husband's private security work brings. Spousal support is legitimized through the broader celebration of neoliberalism as bringing flexibility and financial rewards and militarism as normalizing and privileging men's work in private security.

## **Conclusion**

By bringing female spouses into the study of private security and global military operations we begin to see how both militarism and neoliberalism shape gendered family relations. In comparison with research done on military households, the security industry can also be seen as a greedy institution, in what labour it demands of its workforce and by extension, the military and private security households. Yet importantly, the industry was seen as a space of freedom and choice for these wives—one where they felt they, as managers of the household, could finally come first in considering the contracts they as a family chose for their husband to pursue.

Taking female contractor spouses seriously demands a rethinking of what constitutes the gender relations underpinning private security and what labour the household is required to perform. Such a perspective moves us away from an understanding of the private male contractor as an individual actor and instead sees him within a web of relations (Terry 2015). Taking men's relations within their family seriously tells us something fundamental about how security privatization works and upon whose labour it relies. Bringing spouses into the discussion of PMSCs demonstrates that despite the incentives to marketize one's skills and the freedom to choose private security work, the privatization of security relies on and further entrenches a gendered division of labour within the household that takes women's work for granted. Women's support labour is conditioned by the legacy of militarism, but in the context of private security it is justified by neoliberal rationalities.

Many of the women we interviewed saw the industry as one that allows more flexibility and control over their family life, especially compared to the military. Private security work allowed their partners to be more physically present and the finances to achieve greater material possibilities. These are the payoffs for the female spouses who the industry expects to perform a host of tasks: to offer emotional and intellectual support to their husband during the transition to private security and when working abroad, to sacrifice their own careers in support of their husband's work, to be resilient during overseas deployments, to manage and maintain a secure home life for the husband to return to, and to ideologically approve of the work their husbands do. While public militaries also rely on spousal support, in the public sphere there is a symbolic and fiscal acknowledgement of the military family (albeit often insufficient). As this paper has demonstrated, the celebration of flexibilization and financial rewards and the normalization of men's work in private security and women's private support labour are key features in the

privatization of security. Both gendered militarism and neoliberalism are central to how the private security industry is able to draw upon the labour of eager contractors and their supportive spouses.

## **Bibliography**

- Abrahamsen, R. and Williams, M.C. 2009. "Security Beyond the State: Global Security Assemblages in International Politics" *International Political Sociology*. 3(1): 1-17
- Adler P.A., and P. Adler 1987. *Membership roles in field research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Barker, I.V. 2009. "(Re)producing American Soldiers in an Age of Empire." *Politics and Gender* 5 (2): 211-235.
- Basham, V., and S. Catignani. 2018. "War is where the hearth is: gendered labour and the everyday reproduction of the geopolitical in the army reserves." *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2018.1442736
- Chisholm, A. 2014a. "The Silenced and Indispensable: Gurkhas in Private Military Security Companies." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16 (1): 26-47.
- Chisholm, A. 2014b. "Marketing the Gurkha Security Package: Colonial Histories and Neoliberal Economies of Private Security." *Security Dialogue* 45 (4): 349-372.
- Chisholm, A. 2015. "From Warriors of Empire to Martial Contractors: Reimagining Gurkhas in Private Security." In *Gender and Private Security in Global Politics*, edited by M. Eichler, 95-113. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chisholm, A. 2017. "Clients, Contractors and Everyday Masculinities in Global Private Security." *Critical Military Studies* 3 (2): 120-141.

- Chisholm, A., and S. Stachowitsch. 2016. "Racing to Recruit: A Feminist Global Political Economy Perspective on Gurkhas and Private Security Labour Markets." *Globalizations*. DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2016.1155796
- Chisholm, A., and S. Stachowitsch. 2018. "Military Markets, Masculinities and the Global Political Economy of the Everyday: Understanding Military Outsourcing as Gendered and Racialised" in Woodward R. and C. Duncanson's (eds.) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave MacMillian, pp. 371-386
- Corbin Dwyer, S., and J.L. Buckle. 2009. "The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8 (1): 54-63.
- Douglass, M. 2012. "Global Householding and Social Reproduction: Migration Research, Dynamics and Public Policy in East and Southeast Asia." *Asia Research Institute*. Working Paper Series No. 188.
- Eichler, M. 2013. "Gender and the Privatization of Security: Neoliberal Transformation of the Militarized Gender Order." *Critical Studies on Security* 1 (3): 311-325.
- Eichler, M. 2014. "Contracting Out Military Work: From National Conscription to Globalized Recruitment." *Citizenship Studies* 18 (6-7): 600-614.
- Eichler, M., ed. 2015. *Gender and Private Security in Global Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Elias, J., and S. Gunawardana, eds. 2013. *The Global Political Economy of the Household in Asia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillian.
- Enloe, C. 1989. *Bases, Beaches, Bananas: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Enloe, C. 2000. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, 142-159.

Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fluri, J. 2009. "Geopolitics of Gender and Violence 'From Below.'" *Political Geography* 28 (4): 259-265.

Fortunati, L. 1995. *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labour and Capital*. New York: Autonomedia.

Franke, V., and M. von Boemcken. 2011. "Guns for Hire: Motivations and Attitudes of Private Security Contractors." *Armed Forces and Society* 37 (4): 571-597.

Gill, R., and C. Scharff eds. 2011. *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Gray, H. 2016. "Domestic Abuse and the Public/Private Divide in the British Military." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 23 (6): 912-925.

Gray, Harriet. 2017. "Domestic Abuse and the Reproduction of the Idealised 'Military Wife.'" In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* edited by Rachel Woodward and Claire Duncanson. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harrison, D., and L. Laliberté. 1994. *No Life Like It: Military Wives in Canada*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Limited.

Hedström, Jenny. 2016. "The Political Economy of the Kachin Revolutionary Household." *Pacific Review* 30 (4): 581-595.

Horn, D. 2009. "Boots and Bedsheets: Constructing the Military Support System in a Time of War." In *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by L. Sjoberg and S. Via, 57-68. Santa Barbara: Praeger.

Hyde, A. 2016. "The present tense of Afghanistan: accounting for space, time and gender in processes of militarization." *Gender, Place and Culture*. Vol. 23(6): 857-868

- James, N. 1989. Emotional Labour: Skill and Work in the Social Regulations of Feelings.” *The Sociological Review* 37(1): 15-42
- Joachim, J., and A. Schneiker. 2012. “Of ‘True Professionals’ and ‘Ethical Hero Warriors’: A Gender Discourse Analysis of Private Military and Security Companies.” *Security Dialogue* 43 (6): 495-512.
- LeBaron, G., and A. Roberts. 2010. “Toward a Feminist Political Economy of Capitalism and Carcerality.” *Signs* 36 (1): 19-44.
- Luxton, M. 1980. *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home*. Toronto: The Women's Press.
- McDowell, L. 2009. *Working Bodies: Interactive Service Employment and Workplace Identities*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Peterson, S.V. 2003. *A Critical Rewriting of Global Political Economy. Integrating Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies*. New York/London: Routledge.
- Rai, Shirin M., C. Hoskyns, and D. Thomas. 2014. “Depletion”. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 16: 86-105.
- Safri, M., and J. Graham. 2010. “The Global Household: Toward a Feminist Postcapitalist International Political Economy.” *Signs*. 36 (1): 99-126.
- Segal, M. W. 1986. “The Military And the Family As Greedy Institutions.” *Armed Forces & Society* 13, no. 1: 9-38.
- Singer, P. W. 2003. *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Sjoberg, L., ed. 2009. *Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.

- Sjoberg, L., and J.A. Tickner. 2013. "Feminist Perspectives on International Relations" In *Handbook of International Relations*, edited by W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse-Kappen and B.A. Simmons, 170-194. Los Angeles: Sage Press.
- Stachowitsch, S. 2015. "Military Privatization as a Gendered Process: A Case for Integrating Feminist International Relations and Feminist State Theories." In *Gender and Private Security in Global Politics*, edited by M. Eichler, 19-36. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stern, M. 2005. *Naming Security-Constructing Identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Tepe-Belfrage, D., and J. Montgomerie. 2016. "Broken Britain: Post-Crisis Austerity and the Trouble with the Troubled Family Programme," In *Scandalous Economics: Gender and the Politics of Financial Crisis*, edited by A. Hozic and J. True, 79-91. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Terry, J. 2015. "Responsibility, Empathy, and the Morality of Mercenaries: A Feminist Ethical Appraisal of PMSCs." In *Gender and Private Security in Global Politics*, edited by M. Eichler. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Waring, M. 1999. *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Williams, J., and V. Massaro. 2013. "Feminist Geopolitics: Unpacking (in)Security, Animating Social Change." *Geopolitics* 18 (4): 751-758.